

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:
 - dispatching an airborne drone to an item of inventory located within a retail shopping facility;
 - securing the item of inventory to the airborne drone;
 - directing the airborne drone to carry the item of inventory to a delivery area located within the retail shopping facility.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein dispatching the airborne drone to the item of inventory and directing the airborne drone to the delivery area comprises using a central computer system for the retail shopping facility to dispatch and direct the airborne drone.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein dispatching the airborne drone to the item of inventory and directing the airborne drone to the delivery area comprises using, at least in part, on-board sensors to detect obstacles.
4. The method of claim 3 wherein dispatching the airborne drone to the item of inventory and directing the airborne drone to the delivery area further comprises using, at least in part, remote sensors to detect obstacles.
5. The method of claim 4 wherein the remote sensors include, at least in part, video cameras mounted within the retail shopping facility.
6. The method of claim 5 wherein dispatching the airborne drone to the item of inventory and directing the airborne drone to the delivery area further comprises using a central computer system to process information provided by the video cameras to thereby detect obstacles.
7. The method of claim 1 wherein dispatching the airborne drone to the item of inventory located within the retail shopping facility comprises dispatching the airborne drone to a non-public item storage area.
8. The method of claim 7 wherein the delivery area is located within a public retail sales area of the retail shopping facility.
9. The method of claim 8 wherein the delivery area comprises a retail point of sale area.
10. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 - landing the airborne drone at the delivery area;
 - detaching the item of inventory from the airborne drone.
11. The method of claim 10 further comprising:
 - directing the airborne drone away from the delivery area to thereby leave the item of inventory at the delivery area.
12. The method of claim 1 wherein dispatching the airborne drone to the item of inventory and directing the airborne drone to the delivery area comprises using a

three-dimensional map of the retail shopping facility when determining a flight path for the airborne drone.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein using a three-dimensional map when determining a flight path for the airborne drone comprises having a central computer system use the three-dimensional map when determining the flight-path for the airborne drone.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein determining the flightpath for the airborne drone further comprises using obstacle-detection sensor information.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the obstacle-detection sensor information comprises information provided to the central computer system by at least one on-board sensor as corresponds to the airborne drone.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the on-board sensor comprises at least one of:

- a camera;
- a video camera;
- a sound-based proximity sensor;
- a light-based proximity sensor;
- an accelerometer;
- a gyroscope;
- a magnetometer.

17. The method of claim 14 wherein the obstacle-detection sensor information comprises information provided to the central computer system by at least one installed sensor as corresponds to the retail shopping facility.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the at least one installed sensor comprises at least one of:

- a camera;
- a video camera;
- a sound-based proximity sensor;
- a light-based proximity sensor;
- an accelerometer;
- a gyroscope;
- a magnetometer.

19. The method of claim 14 wherein the obstacle-detection sensor information comprises information provided to the central's computer system by at least one on-board sensor as corresponds to the airborne drone and by at least one installed sensor as corresponds to the retail shopping facility.

20. The method of claim 1 wherein at least one of dispatching and directing the airborne drone comprises directing the airborne drone to pass through an opening in a wall.

* * * * *